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Alaska National Guard supports peacekeeping exercise in Mongolia

CAMP DENALI, Alaska — Approximately 80 Alaska National Guard members have arrived in Mongolia to participate in Exercise Khaan Quest 2013, scheduled to take place until Aug. 14 at Five Hills Training Area and the city of Ulaanbaatar.

Most of the Alaska Guardsmen left Alaska Aug. 5 and now join efforts with approximately 1,000 service members from across the Pacific region during Khaan Quest, a training exercise focused on peacekeeping operations.

"Khaan Quest is a part of a theater security cooperation strategy which focuses on building relationships and enhancing the peacekeeping capabilities of our allies," said Lt. Col. Matthew Schell, 1st Battalion, 207th Aviation Regiment, Alaska Army National Guard.

This year Khaan Quest consists of a command post exercise and a field training exercise. During these events, Mongolian, U.S. and multinational forces will work to enhance regional interoperability, and mission effectiveness, as well as develop common tactics, techniques and procedures.

Mongolian and U.S. armed forces, along with other regional partners, will also collaborate to conduct Engineering Civic Action Program projects, as well as Cooperative Health Engagement events in Ulaanbaatar.

"Participating in Khaan Quest allows us to continue our State Partnership Program with Mongolia," said Schell who will operate as the battalion commander during the command post exercise. "We will be able to work side-by-side, using the military decision-making process and preparing orders for peacekeeping missions."

Partnered in 2003, Alaska and Mongolia have formed a relationship sharing information through multiple exchanges and exercises.

Sgt. Maj. Richard Hildreth, 297th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade command sergeant major, Alaska Army National Guard, will serve as the KQ13 exercise support group non-commissioned officer in charge.

He also attended Khaan Quest last year and deployed for seven months in 2011 as a U.S. liaison in support of the Mongolian Expeditionary Forces in Afghanistan.

"I'm looking forward to another opportunity to see some of the Mongolian soldiers who I served with in Afghanistan," Hildreth said. "The beautiful countryside, the rolling hills and vast horizons of Mongolia are a rare treat to behold."

In addition to Mongolia and the United States, military personnel from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, India, Nepal, Republic of Korea, Tajikistan, United Kingdom and Vietnam were invited to participate. Russia and China are slated to send observers to the exercise.

Khaan Quest is co-sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific and U.S. Marine Corps Forces, hosted annually by the Mongolia Armed Forces. The exercise is designed to enhance military-to-military relations between the U.S., Mongolia and other international forces in the Pacific region, to improve peace keeping operations capabilities and to increase interoperability among the participating nations.

This exercise marks the eleventh anniversary of this regionally significant training event.

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